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## HISTORIES OF SYRIAC LITERATURE

WORKS CITED ([HTTP://SYRI.AC/BIBLIOGRAPHY?F\[KEYWORD\]=18](http://syriac/bibliography?f[keyword]=18))

### A NOTE TO READERS

On this page we have attempted to collect all the major histories of Syriac literature. The most comprehensive history is without a doubt A. Baumstark (/bibliography?f%5Bauthor%5D=234), *Geschichte der syrischen Literatur, mit Ausschluss der christlich-palästinensischen Texte* (/bibliography/30048737). Bonn: A. Marcus and E. Webers, 1922.. Baumstark, however, can be quite forbidding to use: his German is difficult and obscure, even for native speakers, and his system of abbreviations will seem arcane and confusing at first. However, Baumstark's exhaustive knowledge of primary sources and manuscript collections in both Europe and the Middle East has been matched by very few scholars in the history of Syriac scholarship. At some point, any serious research on a Syriac topic will lead to Baumstark's *Geschichte*.

Baumstark died in 1948, leaving behind a personal copy of his *Geschichte* with extensive annotations, presumably in preparation for a new edition. Unfortunately, these notes proved to be practically impossible to decipher. For this reason, a second edition of his *Geschichte* has never appeared. Nevertheless, in 1954, a short overview of Syriac literature by Baumstark and Rucker was published posthumously as part of a handbook of oriental literature.<sup>1</sup> This short history should be consulted as a supplement to Baumstark's earlier, monumental work.

For the student just finding his or her legs in the field of Syriac studies, undoubtedly the best place to start is S. P. Brock (/bibliography?f%5Bauthor%5D=16), *A brief outline of Syriac literature* (/bibliography/1322805889). Kottayam: St. Ephrem Ecumenical Research Institute, 1987.. As Dr. Brock has acknowledged, this work was originally produced and published somewhat in haste for a specific course for Syriac students in Kerala, India. Nevertheless, it has become a minor classic and extremely useful to have at hand. Prior to its dissemination on the web, this book was very difficult to find a copy of. Especially noteworthy are Brock's bibliographies on selected topics at the back of the *Brief Outline* as well as his included selection of translations. These are often unavailable elsewhere even though some represent very important passages: on, for instance, the topic of Greco-Syriac translations in antiquity.

'Abdisho' bar Brikha's *Catalogue of Syriac Books*, written perhaps in the fourteenth century, is an indispensable history of Syriac literature by a someone within the tradition itself during the twilight of its classical period. 'Abdisho's catalogue is an invaluable witness to what books were available in East Syrian circles in his day. A number of works he cites are no longer extant. Baumstark frequently cites 'Abdisho and uses the abbreviation "(Ai)" followed by a paragraph number referring to Assemani's edition of the text (the only one ever produced) in the *Bibliotheca Orientalis*.<sup>2</sup> Earlier than 'Abdisho' bar Brikha, the *Chronicle of Seert*, Michael the Syrian, and Bar Hebraeus also included precious details about the history of Syriac literature in their chronicles. Each of these works has a corresponding page on syriac.<sup>3</sup>

Assemani's *Bibliotheca Orientalis* stands at the root of Western scholarship on Syriac literature.<sup>4</sup> Assemani was a Maronite priest from Lebanon who spent most of his life in Rome. The *BO* is a history of all of Syriac literature based largely on Assemani's meticulous and painstaking reading of a huge number of manuscripts. Providing generous extracts and a remarkable synthesis of material, it is a monument of careful scholarship and stands with William Wright's catalogue of Syriac in the British Museum<sup>5</sup> as one of the two greatest efforts in the history of Syriac scholarship in the West. In fact, nearly 300 years after its publication, the *BO* contains texts that can still be found nowhere else. Assemani's profound knowledge of the Syriac tradition has been matched by few since him. Importantly, Assemani was a scholar who stood in two traditions of Syriac scholarship: the Middle Eastern and the European. His transfer of an insider's knowledge of the Syriac tradition to the West was a fortuitous act which allowed Syriac scholarship to gain a solid footing in early modern Europe. Assemani was not alone in this work: other Middle Eastern scholars made similar bridges between East and West, such as Moses of Mardin, Ibrahim al-Haqilani (sc. Echellensis), and other members of the Assemani family. The Maronite College of Rome was a key point of this transmission. With the publication of the *BO*, a critical mass of non-Biblical Syriac texts, along with accessible Latin translations, became newly available to European scholars. At that time, and still today, just by reading the *BO* one can receive an education in the whole of Syriac literature.

The works by Bettiolio and Albert linked below are useful for quick orientations to major instrumenta in Syriac studies. Ortiz de Urbina's *Patrologia Siriaca*,<sup>6</sup> even though now somewhat dated, provides an extremely useful overview of all the major Syriac authors and instrumenta. An updated version of this work is currently a desideratum in Syriac studies. Duval's *Littérature* is old but nicely organized according to topics (philosophical literature, ascetical literature, translations, etc.) and can be a good place to begin if you are interested in a specific topic. Chabot's *Littérature* is little known and little used, but this neglect is unwarranted, since he can be useful for quick overviews of individual authors. The most recent major history of Syriac literature is Albert Abuna's, in Arabic. Albuna is particularly invaluable for his information about Middle Eastern scholarship into the twentieth century. In general, there is an enormous amount of information to be found in all of the histories below, and one can explore them all with great profit.

## ‘ABDISHO’ BAR BRIKHA

- J. S. Assemani (/bibliography?f%5Bauthor%5D=193), *Bibliotheca Orientalis: De Scriptoribus Syris Nestorianis* (/bibliography/301740808), vol. 3.1. Rome: Sacred Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith, 1725.
  - 'Abdisho' bar Brikha, *Catalogue of Syriac Books* (<http://digitale-sammlungen.ulb.uni-bonn.de/ulbbn/content/pageview/140216>)

At the root of all studies of the history of Syriac literature is the *Catalogue of Books* of the East Syrian 'Abdisho' bar Brikha (d. 1318). His work is analogous to Photios' *Bibliotheca* or the *Suda* for the history of Greek literature and to Ibn al-Nadim for Arabic. He lists many works that are now lost or fragmentary. His *Catalog* was first published (<http://digitale-sammlungen.ulb.uni-bonn.de/ulbbn/content/pageview/140216>) by Assemani in the *Bibliotheca Orientalis* (see below). An English translation can be found here ([https://archive.org/stream/TheNestoriansAndTheirRituals/The\\_Nestorians\\_and\\_Their\\_Rituals#page/n395/mode/1up](https://archive.org/stream/TheNestoriansAndTheirRituals/The_Nestorians_and_Their_Rituals#page/n395/mode/1up)),<sup>7</sup> and this is an overview (<http://s2w.hbz-nrw.de/ulbbn/content/structure/33339>) of the contents of this work.

## ABUNA, ADAB AL-LUGHA AL-ARAMIYYA

- A. Abuna (/bibliography?f%5Bauthor%5D=517), *Adab al-lugha al-aramiyya* (/bibliography/696479231), 2nd ed. Beirut: Dar al-Mashriq, 1996.

This is little-known history of Syriac literature contains much valuable material and deserves to be wider-known and used. It is the most recently published major history of Syriac literature and Abuna gives good discussions of scholarship on a variety of issues, providing generous bibliographic and manuscript information. Especially important is the information Abuna gives on the history of more recently Syriac scholarship in the Middle East, information not easily found anywhere else.

## ALBERT, "LANGUE ET LITTÉRATURE"

- M. Albert (/bibliography?f%5Bauthor%5D=518), "Langue et littérature syriaques" (/bibliography/1263102061), in *Christianismes orientaux: Introduction à l'étude des langues et des littératures*, Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 1993, pp. 297–375.
  - Pp. 297-375. (<http://archive.org/details/LangueEtLitteratureSyriaques>)

An extremely useful and well-organized introduction to Syriac bibliography, literature, and instrumenta. In general, the volume from which it is taken, *Christianismes orientaux*, is a wonderful resource, one which covers all the languages of the Christian Orient. It should be on the bookshelf of any student interested in doing serious study of this subject.

## ASSEMANI, *BIBLIOTHECA ORIENTALIS*

- S. E. Assemani, *Bibliotheca Orientalis*, 4 vols. in 3. (Rome, 1719–1728). (<http://s2w.hbz-nrw.de/ulbbn/content/titleinfo/121369>)
  - (<http://s2w.hbz-nrw.de/ulbbn/content/titleinfo/121369>) J. S. Assemani (/bibliography?f%5Bauthor%5D=193), Ed., *Bibliotheca Orientalis* (/bibliography/1848115005), vol. 1, 3 vol. Rome: Society for the Propagation of the Faith, 1719.
  - J. S. Assemani (/bibliography?f%5Bauthor%5D=193), *Bibliotheca Orientalis: De Scriptoribus Syris Monophysitis* (/bibliography/1881442426), vol. 2, 3 vol. Rome: Society for the Propagation of the Faith, 1721.
  - J. S. Assemani (/bibliography?f%5Bauthor%5D=193), *Bibliotheca Orientalis: De Scriptoribus Syris Nestorianis* (/bibliography/301740808), vol. 3.1. Rome: Sacred Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith, 1725.
  - J. S. Assemani (/bibliography?f%5Bauthor%5D=193), *Bibliotheca Orientalis* (/bibliography/161267559), vol. 3.2, 3 vol. Rome: Sacred Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith, 1728.

The *BO* was and is a landmark in the history of Syriac scholarship in the West. If all philosophy is a footnote to Plato, as has been said, then at some level, all Syriac scholarship is a footnote to (and expansion of) the amazing scholarship of Assemani. Hundreds of years after its publication, there is still nothing quite like it. Some of the texts Assemani published (e.g., 'Abdisho's *Catalogue of Syriac Books*, mentioned above) have never been superseded. A short account of Assemani's life was written in both Arabic ([https://archive.org/stream/SeriesChronologicaPatriarcharumAntioc/Series\\_chronologica\\_Patriarcharum\\_Antioc#page/n115/mode/2up](https://archive.org/stream/SeriesChronologicaPatriarcharumAntioc/Series_chronologica_Patriarcharum_Antioc#page/n115/mode/2up)) and Latin ([https://archive.org/stream/SeriesChronologicaPatriarcharumAntioc/Series\\_chronologica\\_Patriarcharum\\_Antioc#page/n11/mode/2up](https://archive.org/stream/SeriesChronologicaPatriarcharumAntioc/Series_chronologica_Patriarcharum_Antioc#page/n11/mode/2up)).

## BAUMSTARK, *GESCHICHTE*

- A. Baumstark (/bibliography?f%5Bauthor%5D=234), *Geschichte der syrischen Literatur, mit Ausschluss der christlich-palästinensischen Texte* (/bibliography/30048737). Bonn: A. Marcus and E. Webers, 1922.

Ninety years after its publication, this is still the standard history of Syriac literature. Baumstark's mastery of information in Syriac manuscript catalogs and his ability to piece together historical information from a variety of different sources was phenomenal. This book represents a storehouse of knowledge. When investigating an author, however, one should be aware that catalogs had not yet appeared of Mingana's very important collection in Birmingham; therefore, Mingana's indices should always be consulted, in addition to Baumstark.<sup>8</sup> Baumstark also made use of catalogs by Scher of MSS collections in the Middle East which were destroyed or moved in the context of the widespread massacres of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. This means that MSS he cites from these collections may not be there or may unfortunately no longer even exist. Desreumaux's *Repertoire* should be consulted when trying to track down the present location of these manuscripts.<sup>9</sup> HMML's work cataloging the manuscript riches of Middle Eastern collections also offers the potential for updating some entries in Baumstark (and perhaps adding a few more).<sup>10</sup> The New Finds at St Catherine's, both fragments<sup>11</sup> and full manuscripts<sup>12</sup>, also are not reflected in Baumstark's learned footnotes. New finds at Dayr al-Suryan also promise to add to our knowledge of Syriac literature. See S. P. Brock (/bibliography?f%5Bauthor%5D=16) and Rompay, L. van (/bibliography?f%5Bauthor%5D=64), "The Syriac Manuscripts of Deir al-Surian: Some first Impressions" (/bibliography/30496577), *Newsletter of the Levantine Foundation*, vol. 1, pp. 3-4, 2006.. When he died, Baumstark left behind a copy of his *Geschichte* that was rich in marginal notes for a new edition; his handwriting, however, was so difficult to decipher that no scholar has been able to read these notes and publish them. Six years after he died, a brief history of Syriac literature, which supplements and updates his immortal *Geschichte* was published as A. Baumstark (/bibliography?f%5Bauthor%5D=234), Rücker, A. (/bibliography?f%5Bauthor%5D=250), and Spuler, B. (/bibliography?f%5Bauthor%5D=516), "Die syrische Literatur" (/bibliography/2038726416), in *Semitistik*, Brill: Leiden, 1954, pp. 168-204..

## BAUMSTARK, *DIE CHRISTLICHEN LITERATUREN*

- A. Baumstark (/bibliography?f%5Bauthor%5D=234), *Die christlichen Literaturen des Orients* (/bibliography/207236526), vol. 1, 2 vol. Leipzig: G.J. Göschen, 1911.
- A. Baumstark (/bibliography?f%5Bauthor%5D=234), *Die christlichen Literaturen des Orients* (/bibliography/1037847883), vol. 2, 2 vol. Leipzig: Göschen, 1911.

## BARSOUM, *SCATTERED PEARLS*

- A. Barsoum (/bibliography?f%5Bauthor%5D=522), *The Scattered Pearls: A History of Syriac Literature and Sciences* (/bibliography/1621636910), 2nd ed. New York, 1965.

Barsoum had an extremely thorough knowledge of Syrian Orthodox manuscript collections in the Middle East, which is one of the strong suits of this particular history of Syriac literature. And because of the digitization efforts of HMML, it is now possible to track down specific MSS which Barsoum refers to. The Arabic text can be found here (<http://archive.org/details/Al-luluAl-manthurFiTarikhAl-ulumWa-l-adabAl-suryaniyyatheScattered>).

## BETTIOLO, "LINEAMENTI"

- P. Bettio (/bibliography?f%5Bauthor%5D=524), "Lineamenti di patrologia siriana" (/bibliography/1498063853), in *Complementi interdisciplinari di patrologia*, A. Quacquarelli (/bibliography?f%5Bauthor%5D=525), Ed. Rome: Città Nuova, 1969, pp. 503-603.
  - Pp. 503-603 (<http://archive.org/details/LineamentiDiPatrologiaSiriana>).

## BETTIOLO, "SYRIAC LITERATURE"

- P. Bettio (/[bibliography?f%5Bauthor%5D=524](#)), “**Syriac Literature**” (/[bibliography/166000620](#)), in *Patrology: The Eastern Fathers from the Council of Chalcedon (451) to John of Damascus (750)*, vol. 5, A. Di Berardino (/[bibliography?f%5Bauthor%5D=526](#)), Walford, A. (/[bibliography?f%5Bauthor%5D=527](#)), and Quasten, J. (/[bibliography?f%5Bauthor%5D=528](#)), Eds. Cambridge: James Clarke, 2006, pp. 407-490.
  - Pp. 407–490 (<https://archive.org/stream/SyriacLiterature/BettioSyriacLiterature#page/n0/mode/1up>).

These latter two are lesser known, yet still very useful overviews of Syriac language and literature. Bettio's article from 2006 is a translation of an article he published in Italian in 2000 and represents the most recent bibliographic overview of Syriac literature that we are aware of.

## BROCK, *BRIEF OUTLINE*

- S. P. Brock (/[bibliography?f%5Bauthor%5D=16](#)), **A brief outline of Syriac literature** (/[bibliography/1322805889](#)). Kottayam: St. Ephrem Ecumenical Research Institute, 1987.

For newcomers to the history of Syriac literature, this hard-to-find and now out-of-print volume is a very helpful touchstone. It represents an expert simplification of the major scholarly literary histories listed below. We have now linked to a version which has the entire *Brief Outline*. We originally linked to a smaller version which did not have the chrestomathy of texts at the back of the volume; that version can still be found here (<https://archive.org/details/ABriefOutlineOfSyriacLiterature>).

## BROCKELMANN, *GESCHICHTE*

- C. Brockelmann (/[bibliography?f%5Bauthor%5D=100](#)), **Geschichte der christlichen Literaturen des Orients** (/[bibliography/1546751396](#)), vol. 2. Leipzig: Amelangs Verlag, 1907.

Though surpassed by later work, this is worth having a look at, and can give useful overviews.

## CHABOT, *LITTÉRATURE SYRIAQUE*

- J. - B. Chabot (/[bibliography?f%5Bauthor%5D=200](#)), **Littérature syriaque** (/[bibliography/442654021](#)). Paris: Librairie Bloud et Gay, 1935.

This history of Syriac literature is not as well known, but is nevertheless useful and concise.

## DUVAL, *LITTÉRATURE SYRIAQUE*

- R. Duval (/[bibliography?f%5Bauthor%5D=99](#)), **La littérature syriaque** (/[bibliography/1584373405](#)). Paris: Victor Lecoffre, 1907.

## ORTIZ DE URBINA, *PATROLOGIA SYRIACA*

- I. O. de Urbina (/[bibliography?f%5Bauthor%5D=247](#)), **Patrologia Syriaca** (/[bibliography/652704446](#)). Rome: Pontifical Institute, 1958.

In Latin. Organized topically and extremely useful once one has figured out how to use it, even though it is now dated.

## PEETERS, *BHO*

- P. Peeters (/[bibliography?f%5Bauthor%5D=254](#)), Ed., **Bibliotheca Hagiographica Orientalis** (/[bibliography/1537817436](#)). Brussels: Society of Bollandists, 1910.

Although it has been surpassed by Fiey (<http://www.csc.org.il/db/search.aspx?db=SB&f1=fiey&f2=saints%20syriaques&f3=&fn1=Author&fn2=Title&fn3=&c1=and&c2=and&yf=&yt=>) and the BSO

(<http://www.csc.org.il/db/search.aspx?db=SB&f1=Enciclopedia%20dei%20santi%20&f2=&f3=&fn1=Title&fn2=Title&fn3=&c1=and&c2=and&yf=&yt=>), this classic work by Paul Peeters

remains a valuable store of information.<sup>13</sup>

## WRIGHT, *SHORT HISTORY*

- W. Wright (/[bibliography?f%5Bauthor%5D=126](#)), **A Short History of Syriac Literature** (/[bibliography/867104194](#)). London: Black, 1894.

Based on Wright's Encyclopedia Britannica article. The information on biblical versions is now dated and should not be relied upon, but Wright is still very useful for later material. Strangely, Wright displays a dismissive and even hostile attitude to Syriac literature, describing it as mediocre, at the beginning of this volume, even though he spent years of his life working with Syriac materials. J. Murray (/[bibliography?f%5Bauthor%5D=532](#)), “**Prof. William Wright [Obituary]**” (/[bibliography/648684289](#)), *The Academy*, vol. 35, p. 378, 1889.. A long notice on his life at “**W. Wright [Obituary]**” (/[bibliography/1193592287](#)), *Trübner's Record*, vol. 1, no. 1, pp. 93-95, 1889..

## FURTHER NOTES

- The publication of the *BO* in Rome in the 18th century, as monumental as it was, proved to be only one piece of long and deep heritage of Middle Eastern scholars working on Syriac subjects in the modern world. Figures such as Paul Bedjan, Alphonse Mingana, and Philoxenos Dolabani are just three examples of the continuing study of Syriac literature on the ground in the region. For obvious reasons, Western scholars are today often unaware of Middle Eastern publications on Syriac topics or, even if they are aware, they are probably unable to access the books. Only a few collections in the US (such as the libraries of Harvard and Princeton universities) will collect such rare Middle Eastern publications. Indeed, the most important collection of Middle Eastern scholarship outside the Middle East (and which rivals and surpasses most collections in the Middle East itself) is the personal library of Dr. George Kiraz, which is held at the Beth Mardutho Research Library (<http://www.bethmardutho.org>) in New Jersey, now part of the Rutgers University library system ([http://www.libraries.rutgers.edu/rul/news/12/06\\_syriac\\_institute.shtml](http://www.libraries.rutgers.edu/rul/news/12/06_syriac_institute.shtml)). To give just one example, the Beth Mardutho Research Library has a nearly complete run of the *Syrian Orthodox Patriarchal Journal*, published in Damascus, which contains many valuable articles by leading Middle Eastern scholars such as Dolabani and Barsoum. In these articles they often made use of manuscripts unknown or inaccessible to Western academics. In addition, the Beth Mardutho Research Library contains much of the personal library of Abrohom Nuro, one of the great figures of twentieth-century Syriac, and now also houses the wonderfully rich personal collection of Edward Matthews. The latter boasts a number of rare Armenian works that Matthews bought in Jerusalem from old Armenian families. To learn more about Middle Eastern scholarship on Syriac sources, one should consult Barsoum's *Scattered Pearls*, which we have linked to above (in Arabic and English). Similarly, Albert Abuna's *History of Aramaic Literature*<sup>14</sup> is also a valuable resource and contains a great deal of information about Syriac scholarship in the Middle East up until the 20th century.
- See also the important overview of S.P. Brock in S. P. Brock (/bibliography?f%5Bauthor%5D=16), "Introduction to Syriac Studies" (/bibliography/7411303), in *Horizons in Semitic Studies: Articles for the Student*, J. H. Eaton (/bibliography?f%5Bauthor%5D=533), Ed. Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1980, pp. 1-34.
- E. Nestle (/bibliography?f%5Bauthor%5D=101), *Syrische Grammatik mit Litteratur, Chrestomathie und Glossar* (/bibliography/115609670), Rev. Berlin; New York: H. Reuther, 1888. Eberhard Nestle's bibliography (<http://archive.org/stream/syriacgrammarwi00nestgoog#page/n95/mode/2up>) is the best available listing of early Syriac printed materials. Digitization efforts at major libraries have now made it possible to see many of these items.
- Muhammad Ibn-Ishaq Ibn al-Nadim (/bibliography?f%5Bauthor%5D=535), *Kitab al-Fihrist* (/bibliography/255335474), vol. 1, 2 vol. Leipzig: F.C.W. Fogel, 1871.; Muhammad Ibn-Ishaq Ibn al-Nadim (/bibliography?f%5Bauthor%5D=535), *Kitab al-Fihrist* (/bibliography/977617882), vol. 2, 2 vol. Leipzig: F.C.W. Fogel, 1872. These are very important sources for the history of Arabic and Arabic literature. They also contains a great deal of information about Syriac and Syriac translations into Arabic as well as those who did the translating.
  - Volume 1 ([https://archive.org/stream/KitabAlFihrist/Kitab\\_al\\_Fihrist#page/n295/mode/2up](https://archive.org/stream/KitabAlFihrist/Kitab_al_Fihrist#page/n295/mode/2up))
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- Ibn Abi 'Uṣaybi'a's *'Uyūn al-anbā' fī ṭabaqāt al-aṭibbā'* contains much important information about Aramaic-speaking Christian doctors in the medieval Muslim world. Roger Pearse recently discovered an English translation of this work which was executed in the middle part of the 20th century by an Israeli orientalist. See L. Kopf (/bibliography?f%5Bauthor%5D=537), "'Uyūn al-anbā' fī ṭabaqāt al-aṭibbā'" (/bibliography/1378407833). 2011. For the Arabic version, go here:
  - I. A. 'Uṣaybi'a (/bibliography?f%5Bauthor%5D=538), *'Uyūn al-anbā' fī ṭabaqāt al-aṭibbā'* (/bibliography/1842694286), vol. 1, 2 vol. Frankfurt: Institute for the history of Arabic-Islamic Science, 1995.
  - I. A. 'Uṣaybi'a (/bibliography?f%5Bauthor%5D=538), *'Uyūn al-anbā' fī ṭabaqāt al-aṭibbā'* (/bibliography/1045313136), vol. 2, 2 vol. Frankfurt: Institute for the history of Arabic-Islamic Science, 1995.
- Ibn al-Qifti is another important medieval Arabic source which contains much useful information about Syriac authors, especially ones involved in medicine and the translation of Greek works into Syriac and Arabic. The standard critical edition of Ibn al-Qifti's *Tarikh al-Hukama* was published in 1903 by Julius Lippert and can be found at I. al-Qifti (/bibliography?f%5Bauthor%5D=539), *Tārīkh al-ḥukamā'* (/bibliography/605020784). Leipzig: Dieterich, 1903.
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